

VZCZCXRO7101  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #3928/01 3510638  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 160638Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0875  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003928

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: TRIBES AND TECHNOCRATS MARK PRE-ELECTION  
MANEUVERINGS IN ANBAR

REF: A. (A) BAGHDAD 433  
[1](#)B. (B) BAGHDAD 3008

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John G. Fox for reasons 1.4(b)  
/d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (U) SUMMARY: Several months ago, outsiders looking at the electoral line-up in Anbar Province saw what appeared to be a head-on match up between the governing Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and its nemesis, the Iraq Awakening Conference (MSI). Today the electoral battle lines are blurred. The IIP is not running an independent slate; it is part of a coalition with tribal entities led by the influential head of Anbar's Duleimi tribal confederation. Meanwhile, some "awakening" co-founders have not closed ranks behind the MSI; they will stand before the voters at the head of their own parties, and in effect compete with MSI for the same voter pool. Overall, the emphasis at this stage of the campaign is on a candidate's tribal ties and technocratic competence; some candidates appear to be motivated by little more than political opportunism ) the scramble to switch parties just to stay in the game. There are no Islamist themes or strident ideology. END SUMMARY

End of IIP dominance  
-----

[1](#)3. (U) Although it is too early to predict the outcome in Anbar of the forthcoming provincial election, one development appears likely: the Iraqi Islamic Party's (IIP) undisputed control of the Provincial Council (PC) will end after the ballots are counted. The chief reason is that the party is not fielding an independent list; it has entered into a political bloc called the Coalition of Intellectuals and Tribes for Development (CITD), which yokes together two Islamist and two tribal entities.

[1](#)4. (SBU) According to our IIP contacts, the party will field only 12 of the 29 candidates on the combined list. Thus, even if the CITD does well at the polls, the IIP's influence on the new Council will be diluted by its coalition partners. The other CITD members are:

-- The Anbar Sheikhs and Intellectuals Party, led by Sheikh Amer Abdul al-Sulayman al-Assafi. Amer is one of Anbar's most prominent sheikhs and the head of the province's influential Duleimi tribal confederation.

-- The Independent National Tribal Grouping led by Sheikh Omar al-Jabouri.

-- The General Conference of the Iraqi People (GCIP) led by Adnan Al-Dulaymi. The GCIP is part of the Iraqi Accord Front, a Sunni Islamist political grouping, which also includes the IIP.

[1](#)5. (C) Noteworthy about this combination is that two national

Islamist parties have hitched their electoral fortunes to "tribal" political entities. Note that the word "tribes" figures prominently in the coalition's name, whereas the word "Islamic" is absent from it. Sheikh Amer and the Duleimi confederation are not joining forces with Islamist parties, but the other way around. One explanation, of course, is that the Islamist parties seek to use Amer's tribal brand name to retain a behind-the-scenes control of the Provincial Council after the election. It is more likely, however, that the IIP sees the handwriting on the wall and has opted to emphasize the tribal identity of IIP candidates to ensure the party survives as a local player.

¶6. (C) The IIP has long been vilified by its detractors on the local scene, who complain that the party's control over the Provincial Council is illegitimate, a result only of the widely boycotted January 2005 election. Only 3,700 votes were cast in the whole province at that time; the IIP won about 2,700 of them. On this fragile reed, the legitimacy of Anbar's Provincial Council rests today.  
QAnbar's Provincial Council rests today.

¶7. (C) Moreover, Anbar's IIP has the disadvantage of being the incumbent party, associated with poor public services, electricity blackouts, unemployment, and even bearing some responsibility for the 2005-07 insurgency. Not a few voters are put off by the IIP's religious roots ) it is an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood ) and blame it for importing terrorists into the province. Thus the party has much to gain by downplaying Islamism in favor of a new-found tribal identification.

¶8. (C) The IIP's move to combine with Sheikh Amer fits into a  
BAGHDAD 00003928 002 OF 003

familiar pattern: the party has long had good ties with the province's prominent sheikhs, and even voted to make several of them permanent members of the Provincial Council members. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to sustain a political consensus on the local scene based strictly on partisan politics. Tribal leaders have traditionally affected local decisions, and are doing so today in the upcoming election. In a telling example, Sheikh Amer distributed portions of slaughtered sheep to families in his areas during the recent Eid Al-Adha holiday, a gesture normally expected of a paramount sheikh. This time around, however, the gifts bore CITD markings, a kind of political advertisement.

#### Political Opportunism -----

¶9. (C) The theme of political opportunism ) scrambling to stay in the game ) also affects the careers of individual politicians. IIP loyalist and Provincial Council deputy chairman Khamees Abtan told us recently that he will be in the CITD coalition, but listed as a "tribal" candidate, not an IIP member. Anbar Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed, who has IIP roots but has sought to be non-partisan while in office, will also run on the CITD bloc, -- but as a member of Sheikh Amer's party.

¶10. (SBU) Earlier this fall, the IIP was part of a short-lived courtship with its arch-rival, the Iraq Awakening Conference, or Muatamer Sahawat Al-Iraq (MSI), in an attempt to forge a grand IIP-MSI-tribal alliance. That effort failed, but it left the IIP in the rather favorable position of being teamed up with Sheikh Amer and the Duleimi confederation, thus complicating MSI's election chances.

#### MSI: popular but facing challenges -----

¶11. (SBU) Several months ago, outsiders looking at the forthcoming election saw a match-up between the IIP and MSI. MSI is the successor of the Anbar Awakening Council, founded by the late Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha and a group of tribal

leaders in Ramadi in 2006 to drive Al-Qaeda from that city. During 2008 Sattar's older brother, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, led MSI's metamorphosis from an anti-insurgent security organization into the political party that he now leads.

¶12. (SBU) MSI has offices in many Anbari cities, as well as in cities outside the province. It has strong popular support, at least in Ramadi, and a well-earned image of combating terrorism. In October the party appeared to get an inflow of fresh cash for the election campaign. Today MSI is registered in a bloc with the smaller National Independent Gathering, a technocratic party, a move designed to appeal to voters who are looking for educated, technocratic civic leaders.

¶13. (C) However, Ahmed's grasp on the reins of leadership is questionable. On at least one occasion, he expelled potential rivals from the MSI inner circle. Last spring, the party held a conference during which it jettisoned some of its tribal founders in favor of recruiting technocrats into leadership positions (Ref A). Moreover, some MSI hard-liners have criticized Ahmed for sometimes being too chummy with the IIP, as illustrated by the failed attempt several months ago to form a bloc with it. That move may cost MSI at the polls, because it was strongly opposed by several figures previously close to Sheikh Ahmed.

#### Power challengers

¶14. (U) Several key "awakening" founders have not closed ranks behind Ahmed, but rather are leading their own parties. One is Sheikh Hameed Al-Heiss, the leader of the Anbar Salvation Council, a party with the same name as the 2006-07 anti-insurgent organization in Ramadi. Moyad Al-Thiyabi, Qanti-insurgent organization in Ramadi. Moyad Al-Thiyabi, formerly the MSI's secretary general and a trusted aide of the late Sattar Abu Risha, is on Hameed's list (Ref A).

¶15. (SBU) Hameed is frequently seen with his political ally, Sheikh Ali Hatim Suleiman Al-Dulaymi, who is heading up the National Iraqi Salvation Front (NISF). Ali Hatim is Sheikh Amer's nephew and the presumed heir to head the Duleimi confederation. The fact that he is fielding a list in competition with his uncle suggests a generational-change sub-text to the forthcoming election. In any case, Ali Hatim and Hameed Al-Heis are two parts of a three-party coalition, called the Iraqi Tribes List.

¶16. (C) It should come as no surprise that MSI is up against Ali Hatim and Hameed Al-Heiss. One of the defining traits of

BAGHDAD 00003928 003 OF 003

tribal politics is that it combines and re-combines to prevent any one leader from becoming too strong; Ahmed appears to be facing that situation. In fact, MSI has never been the monolithic Sunni movement that many outside observers have made it out to be (see Ref B).

¶17. (C) In his public statements, Ahmed typically gives the impression that he speaks on behalf of a broader movement, and in that regard his self-promotion is not atypical of many Iraqi tribal sheikhs. Even the foreign press has inaccurately identified Ahmed as the leader of the "Sunni Awakening Movement" (e.g., The Chicago Tribune, July 28), perpetuating the false impression that there is one monolithic Sunni tribal movement with Ahmed at its head. Sheikhs Amer, Hameed, and Ali Hatim are competing in an election, showing that the MSI is not the only game in town.

#### Comment

¶18. (C) The irony of these pre-election maneuverings is that the IIP, a religiously based party and home to many Anbari technocrats, has donned a tribal identity, whereas MSI,

originally a tribal-based security organization, has moved to recruit technocrats. The movements may reflect the awareness of both parties of their vulnerabilities. The IIP no doubt realizes that the appeal of religion as the basis of political life in Iraq is limited, while MSI knows that the electorate prefers rule by technocrat, and even has contempt for semi-illiterate tribal leaders. Both parties seem to be remedying their vulnerabilities.

¶19. (C) Some 38 political entities will test their fortunes in the upcoming polls. We have spoken with many of them. They tend to be pragmatic, meaning that they are focused on improving the local quality of life and willing to continue cooperation with the Coalition. That impression fits with the overall tenor of the race so far, with its emphasis on tribal roots, technological competence and a dash of political opportunism. Many observers here believe that the provincial election will be contested, but not contentious.

CROCKER